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# THE REVOLT IN THE CHURCH

## I

### THE NEW RELIGION

BY THE COUNTESS OF WARWICK

THE question of the effect of war upon the religion of the thoughtful and educated classes is one that, as far as this country is concerned, the Church has settled for itself. In every phase and aspect of its work the Established Church has found shelter somewhere below the heights of each vital occasion; it has not taken a lead where it could follow one, or voiced the needs of the people where silence and a non-committal attitude would suffice. Above all, it has made no attempt to reconcile its conception of the Almighty and Loving Father with the Power that has permitted millions to go to their death in the fulness and vigour of life for quarrels of which they know little and care less, and tens of thousands to come from the battlefield mere parodies and travesties of men, with nothing before them but the maximum of pain and discomfort, the minimum of pension and of ease. Granted that the task before the Church was a very formidable one, that it was even impossible, something of the equivalent in moral courage to the physical courage shown upon the battlefield should have been forthcoming from its spokesmen. Unfortunately there is much to suggest that the Established Church is conserving its courage for the *post bellum* task of preaching the old platitudes and asking those who have seen war, or merely suffered by it, to take them seriously. And truly courage of a kind is needed for this.

With these attempts of a pitifully forlorn body, bankrupt in valour and policy, resource and prestige, most of us who take seriously what is left to us of life will have no concern. For the sake of our forebears, for the sake of our earlier faith and friendships, we will turn our heads away and try to forget that the best cared-for and the most highly pampered appanage of the State failed in the hour of our need to "play the game." Some of us have long suspected that we have troubled too much about the souls of our fellows and not enough about their bodies. Now many are beginning to think that if a soul be set in a body that is properly clad and housed, fed and cared for, the soul will find out its own salvation, and that if it fails, it will at least be no worse off than it must needs be to-day in the keeping of a dead Church. It has been said as a result of the Commonwealth in England our middle classes "entered the prison of Puritanism, and had the key turned upon their spirit for two hundred years." "This led," says Matthew Arnold, "to that character of their steady and respectable life which makes one shiver; its hideousness, its immense ennui." Though these things be true, we are faced by the more significant truth that the Nonconformists as a class, descendants of the Puritans, have found a certain measure of religious consolation during the years of crisis, and have not lacked a wide-eyed and courageous ministry. The Chapel has not hesitated to tell

the truth, and if nonconformity can be won to social service of the most uncompromising kind, and will give to the general interests of the nation an equivalent of the energy and devotion it has given to its own, the changing face of England will testify in a very few years to the quality of the work done.

The failure of the Established Church during the years of war is the inevitable result of its failure during the long years that preceded it. It has been the collapse of an Institution that deliberately dwelt in a world of its own imagining, and never had the strength of will or purpose to tell home-truths to the comfortable and the possessing classes, upon whose support it had learned to rely. Now at last the public conscience is stung.

In an article published towards the end of 1916 an officer who had commanded men recruited from the unspeakable slums round dockland called attention to the "homes" that so many gallant Englishmen were defending from Belgium to East Africa. He told of the slum tenements where only rats can live in comparative ease, where sanitation is at a discount, where light and air are reduced to a minimum, where squalor, poverty, disease are a man's constant companions, and child life is wasted, degraded, and even sacrificed. Doubtless the same story could be told of Glasgow, Dundee, Leeds, Sheffield, Newcastle, and a dozen other important cities, where life for the dwellers in the underworld carries a burden that only death can lighten. A religion that has left these conditions to be explained by platitudes and relieved by charity is surely a faith outworn, not to be redeemed by the efforts of a handful of devoted men who labour beyond their strength in vain endeavour to give their Church its lost repute.

Man needs Religion, and will find it

with or without the aid of the Church; his conscience is the force that impels him to look for a way of life with or without reward when the tale is told. Out of the waste and horror and incoherent welter of war one truth emerges more clearly than any other, the truth that if the nations are to lose the suicidal mania that threatens the carefully built-up civilisation of ages, the sense of responsibility of active citizenship must be possessed by every man and woman, and that this sense is a form of religion. To learn to respect life, to understand that no question is worth the sacrifice of millions of men and women to whom it means little or nothing, we must start by respecting and safeguarding the life that surrounds us in peace time. We must elevate this care for humanity to the highest place in our hearts; it must be our new Religion. We must realise that if a man is a wastrel or a woman a harlot the fault is largely ours, because we have tolerated the conditions that enforced their ruin. We must learn that it will not profit any one of us to save his own soul if in so doing, or while so doing, he has consigned other souls to destruction, or has taken no active steps to combat the destruction going on around him. Passive resistance to war may have some foundation in morals, passive resistance to evil can claim no sanction.

Peace has its massacres no less complete than war, and to the most of these massacres, whether by drink, disease, poverty, or vice, the Established Church has been a spectator, if the term can be applied to that which has eyes but sees not, ears but hears not, and a mouth in which most utterance is platitudinous. The Heads of the Established Church, with one or two brilliant exceptions, do not know anything of the actualities of the world they live in; they do not dare

to know; their training has stereotyped their minds; the present state of the world has found them not only unprepared, but quite helpless to cope with it. I do not expect to live to see the Established Church recognise the truth that the real salvation of this country depends upon the removal of all existing social conditions that create paupers, criminals, and lunatics. I do not expect to hear ministers advocating ceaselessly in the pulpit the taking of the necessary measures for restoring the social balance, quite regardless of the chance that there may be among the congregation some of those whose life-work is responsible for one or more of the evils denounced. Before the war, such home-truths were tolerated only from the preachers who were extremely fashionable and preached to an audience almost exclusively feminine, an audience that took no heed of what they said, and was concerned only with the manner of saying it. One does not dare to dwell upon the fashionable preacher whose congregation is largely feminine!

To speak with a freedom that will seem blasphemous only to the conventionally minded, the Established Church has failed because it has left too much to Christ. It has commended to Him all the fruits of its own failures, and has continued to fail with a tranquil mind. The religion of humanity will be concerned essentially with these failures, and it will not seek to transfer any part of the burden. Not by saying that what is must be will the new religion succeed, but by declaring that much that is must promptly cease to be.

I believe that many of the thousands whose faith has failed them, who regard the stark actualities of suffering as something inexplicable, will find in a new religion of social service the proper anodyne for their loss. Our life-history teaches all

of us in turn that in the service of others we are best able to forget our own troubles. The sufferings of those around us keep us from dwelling upon anxieties nearer home. Now we shall have, not only in Great Britain but all over Europe, when this war is over, millions of men and women whose losses are of the kind that life for all its infinity of resource cannot make good. Had the Church been a light in the darkness of this struggle, the sorrow-stricken would have turned to it; now it seems likely that only a small proportion will do so. For the great mass there will be no hope within its walls, but there will be a great hope outside them. To heal the wounds of others, to comfort the widow and the fatherless, to struggle for the right of men and women to the proper measure of life, to oppose stern resistance to every measure by which man sacrifices man to his ambition or woman to his lusts, to equalise the burdens and the pleasures of sane and normal life, these will be the burdens of the new religion which might take for its motto the famous sentence written by George Sand: "*La vie idéale, n'est autre que la vie normale, telle que nous sommes appelés à la connaître.*"

It may be objected that a religion founded upon material service and, while based upon ethics, ignoring theology altogether, is dangerous or retrogressive in tendency. Such a contention is of course absurd, but it must be met. In the first place, the material and the spiritual part of us are interwoven; none can distinguish clearly the one from the other, or say where the first ends and the second begins. We can change the character of a man or woman merely by a choice of the food they eat. As far as theology is concerned, let any one ask the young and mentally vigorous Church of England clergymen of his intimate acquaint-

ance where they stand to-day in regard to certain popularly accepted doctrines. Then when they have answered the question, or still more likely hung it up surrounded by all manner of indefinite statements, let him ask them whether the sound mind in the healthy body, the man or woman who has light and air and all the other necessities of life, is not likely to be more responsive to the moral law than the city-slum products of our present social system. There can be no doubt about the answer that will be given by the honest man. I am disposed to go as far as to say that any Church capable of reconciling men and women to the social conditions prevailing in England to-day is not doing Christ's work but the Devil's, and is helping to ruin not only the people but the country.

We have trusted Emperors and Kaisers and the rest, and they have failed us; the power that the poor, blinded multitudes have conferred upon them has been shamelessly misused. We have trusted the Church, and it has comforted us with stones when we asked for bread. Naturally we have never trusted politicians; it suffices to endure them; the blindest would not ask one to guide him. Nothing then remains but to develop self-reliance, to take our courage in both hands and to labour to set the world in order, not by delegating the task to any section of the community, but by taking it up each one for himself in pursuit of a common plan.

The world will be the Temple in which the believers in the new religion will labour and worship, for we are told that to labour is to pray, and, indeed, this is the universal experience so that the labour be a worthy one. We shall be striving to mitigate the blasphemy of those who declare, with some knowledge of commercial centres and their purlieus, that man is made

in the image of God! We shall have no priests, no ritual, no Establishment, no superiors or inferiors, no bond of unity save that of labour in the same field. The labour of those who love in the service of those who suffer will be of a new kind, because instead of seeking to mitigate evil and preach resignation, we shall endeavour to destroy evil and preach its overthrow. We shall not preach the world to come; we shall preach the world of which we are a part, the breathing, sentient earth which mankind has endeavoured to make a heaven for the few and a hell for the multitude, failing in the first endeavour perhaps, but meeting with an extraordinary measure of success in the last. And we shall incense a multitude of good, stupid people who are charitably inclined, but think they were sent into the world to be superior to poverty and merely to assist rather than to remove it. The Scribes and the Pharisees and the Publicans, known in the jargon of our latter day as Profiteers, will rage furiously at our doctrine and charge us with all offences under heaven, partly because we are opposing their selfishness, and largely because they cannot understand our motives. But we shall continue in an endeavour to save bodies that they may become the fit habitation for souls, and I believe that we shall derive from our work more satisfaction than is obtainable from the doctrine that the comfortable classes shall inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. Shall we not be hastening the advent of George Sand's prophetic truth, that "The ideal life is the normal life of man as we shall some day see it"? There never was in the history of civilisation, as recorded within our reach, a time when the call was louder for a new religion that seeks to mend the old earth, and reverently leaves the things lying beyond to a Supreme and all-divining Power, whose ways

are as obscure to us as they were to Job himself. The increase of prosperity, of commercialism and mammonism, of overcrowding, want, destitution, and all the kindred results of man's inhumanity to man, should terrify the conscience of the world even more than the horrors of war, for with the latter every imaginable evil is inevitable, but we have had the evils without the necessity. War is one of the fruits of this increase, war that is blind, blundering, and foul, that confounds the innocent with the guilty, and preys upon the young as the Minotaur of old time, though its labyrinth is larger than Crete and includes all the Chancelleries of Europe. If there is a word to be said for war, it is that its sacrifices are bloody and direct, it marches over burning cities and the violated bodies of mothers. Its music is the thunder of guns and the cry of little children for the bread that none can give. Sight and hearing cannot fail the dullest amongst us, and we ask ourselves why this monstrous evil should have fallen like the Black Death that swept Mediæval England from end to end before people had mastered the sanitary laws that set bounds to infection beyond which it may not pass. Asking diligently and searching our minds, we see that the blind, restless pursuit of power, territory, money, the evil that besets our daily lives many times magnified, is the source of this great trouble, that only the people have the power to stop its recurrence, and that they are like children. The old religion has failed them, and men set the world ablaze because "the letter killeth."

We have no glad tidings for the people, we evangelists of the New Religion. We are indeed bearers of evil news, but until the truth is known there can be no hope of setting the crooked straight and making the weak strong. The people know neither their danger nor their strength,

they need help that they may help themselves. Ignored by Government, fooled by politicians, exploited by commercial "magnates," degraded by landlords, drugged by philanthropists, and thrown with all classes of the community into the furnace seven times heated of war, their plight is evil indeed, but not hopeless. In the history of Europe a generation is no more than a day, and if those of us who are devoting the latter end of our life to the sowing cannot hope to see the harvest, we may yet hope to see the young green corn and hear the new-risen larks singing above it in the sunshine and the blue. This is the limit of our hope, but there is enough in it for all encouragement. Like the rest of the world, we shall make our mistakes and meet our disappointments and know seasons when difficulties baffle us, for we shall be called upon to meet the vast array of those who profit by things as they are and are often honestly unconscious that they are delaying world progress for selfish, narrow, and personal ends. Though we attack no religion we shall be attacked by all, for we propose no appeal to the unknown future to mitigate the horrors of the existing present, but we shall at least know that opposition, misrepresentation, and denial are the only soil in which all movements that have a real vitality can hope to thrive. If the movement towards the emancipation of those who walk in darkness met with encouragement on every hand the whole structure would fall by reason of its own weight. There is no danger of that. To be attacked for lack of religion by those who could hardly define their own, to be charged with working for wrong ends by those who have grown gross on the profits of them, is not really to be injured or even annoyed, and to excite the wrath of rulers is merely to hasten the glad day when rulers and ruled will